

VETERANS DAY PROGRAM NOV 11, 2018 NARRATOR

November 11 – Veteran’s Day! We are honored to have this special Sunday to show our appreciation to all Veterans, especially those of you in our church family and in our congregation today. We honor and thank all who have served and also their families, for the sacrifices of their service.

Why do we always celebrate Veteran’s Day on November 11 and not a specific day during the month, as we do for Memorial Day?

World War I ended on the 11th day of the 11th month at the 11th hour. The year was 1918 – so we are celebrating today the **one hundredth anniversary** of the end of World War I. World War I has been described “as an extremely bloody war that engulfed Europe from 1914 to 1919, with huge losses of life and little ground lost or won. Fought mostly by soldiers in [trenches](#), World War I saw an estimated 10 million military deaths and another 20 million wounded. While many hoped that World War I would be "the war to end all wars," in actuality, the concluding peace treaty set the stage for [World War II](#).”¹ And, unfortunately, there have been many wars and conflicts involving the United States of America, since then.

The [assassination of Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand](#) and his wife Sophie on June 28, 1914, was the spark that started the war.

At the start of the war, the Allied forces were France, the United Kingdom, and Russia. (More countries joined later). The Central Powers were Germany and Austria-Hungary.

The French and British engaged with the Germans, and when neither could force the other to move, the trenches became more elaborate. From 1914 to 1917, soldiers on each side of the line fought from their trenches. They fired artillery onto the enemy's position and lobbed grenades. However, each time military leaders ordered a full-fledged attack, the soldiers were forced to leave the "safety" of their trenches.

One author called the war “the War of Attrition”, leaving the trenches and moving into the “No Man’s Land” between the trenches, was perilous and resulted in many deaths. With so many

soldiers killed daily, eventually, the side with the most men would win the war. The nature of trench warfare resulted in millions of young men being slaughtered in the battles of World War I.

By 1917, the Allies were starting to run low on young men. The Allies hoped the United States with its vast resources of men and materials would join their side. One author's viewpoint was the U.S. was staying out of other countries' problems and just did not want to be involved in a war so far away and one that did not seem to affect them in a great way.

However, two major events changed American public opinion about the war. The 1915 sinking of the British ocean liner RMS Lusitania with 159 American passengers, by a German U Boat was the first. The second was the Zimmerman Telegram in early 1917. Germany sent Mexico a coded message promising portions of U.S. land in return for Mexico joining World War I against the United States. The message was intercepted by Britain, translated, and shown to the United States. This brought the war to U.S. soil, giving the U.S. a real reason to enter the war on the side of the Allies.

On April 6, 1917, the United States officially declared war on Germany.

The Russian government had left the war with a peace treaty with Germany in March, 1918. Germany was now able to divert troops to the west to face the new American soldiers.

The new American troops made a difference as they were fresh and enthusiastic, the European troops were tired from years of war. The Germans were soon retreating and the end of the war was near. At the end of 1918, an armistice was finally agreed upon. The fighting was to end on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. November 11, at 11 am, 1918.

For the next several months, diplomats argued and compromised together in order to come up with the [Versailles Treaty](#), the peace treaty that ended World War I.

The carnage left behind by the end of World War I was staggering, for this reason, WWI is remembered for its slaughter, one of the bloodiest wars in history. The 10 million soldiers who died averaged about 6,500 deaths a day, every day. Plus, millions of civilians were also killed.

The battles of World War I were fought around the globe, from the fields of Flanders and France to the Russian plains and deserts of the Middle East. War and its impacts on the world, countries, and people has been the subject of many writings, songs, and memories that attempt to describe the horror, the emotions, the feelings, that are in many ways, indescribable.

It was in this setting that the poem "In Flanders Fields" was written by John McCrae. This poem has become the Poetry of World War I and reminds us of the profound loss in this terrible war.

JOHN McCRAE

I am Major John McCrae. I serve with the Canadian forces as a military doctor and artillery commander near Ypres, Belgium. (**y sounds like ee in sleep ee-press**)

It is May 1915 and the fighting, death, and injuries go on and on in this terrible war. I wake with nightmares of the screams of my soldiers. On the 2nd of May, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, one of my young Canadian artillery officer was killed when an exploding German artillery shell landed near him. We had become friends while he was serving in my artillery unit. A Commander who loses his unit soldiers grieves and a doctor who cannot save his soldiers, is in continual anguish and pain. The unit chaplain had been called away somewhere else on duty the evening my friend, Alexis, was killed. As the brigade doctor, I was asked to conduct the burial services for Lieutenant Helmer, my friend and fallen soldier.

Returning to my tent after the service, I began to try and express my feelings by writing a poem about this war and its terrible consequences. I saw the delicate, vibrant red flowers growing on the shattered ground around us. The red flowers had sprung up in the disturbed ground of the burials around the artillery position. My friend, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer was the inspiration for my thoughts, along with the countless other losses I had seen. I will leave you with my poem and my tears of loss.

In Flanders Fields



by John McCrae, May 1915

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

MOINA MICHAEL

I am Moina Michael. In November 1918, I was working at the YMCA Overseas War Secretaries Headquarters in New York. The Twenty-fifth Conference of the Overseas YMCA War Secretaries was in progress at the headquarters. I bought flowers and decorated the area with lovely vases of colorful blooms. I always think flowers give an uplifting touch to any setting!

This morning, a soldier left a copy of the latest “Ladies Home Journal” on my desk. I browsed through the magazine and found a vivid color illustration of the poem “We Shall Not Sleep”, an alternate name sometimes used for John McCrae’s poem, “In Flanders Fields”. Sadly, Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae had died of pneumonia several months earlier on 28 January 1918.

I had come across the poem before, but reading it on this occasion, I was transfixed by the last verse:

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

The feelings I had were a spiritual experience, I felt I was being called by the voices which had been silenced in death. I made a pledge to keep the faith and vowed to always wear a red poppy of Flanders Field as a sign of remembrance. I decided to write my pledge as a poem response which I would like to read to you. It is called:

We Shall Keep the Faith

by Moina Michael, November 1918

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,

Sleep sweet - to rise anew!

We caught the torch you threw

And holding high, we keep the Faith

With All who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red

That grows on fields where valor led;

It seems to signal to the skies

That blood of heroes never dies,

But lends a lustre to the red

Of the flower that blooms above the dead

In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red

We wear in honor of our dead.

Fear not that ye have died for naught;

We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought

In Flanders Fields.

My quest and determination for making the red poppy a symbol of remembrance started that day. I received a check for \$10 from 3 of the men attending the conference in appreciation for the flowers I had bought. Touched by their gesture, I told them I would buy 25 red poppies. I showed the men the illustrations in the Ladies Home Journal and my response, "We Shall Keep the Faith". The delegates took both poems back into the Conference they were attending.

I searched in the department stores and purchased red silk poppies. When I returned to the YMCA Headquarters in the evening, the delegates asked me for poppies to wear. This was the start, on November 9, 1918, two days before the Armistice, of wearing poppies in memory of all who died in Flanders Fields.

Some people say I had found my cause - to make the poppy a National Memorial Symbol. I wrote to my congressman to campaign for a new national emblem for pins, postcards, and other remembrance items in time for the signing of the peace treaty at Versailles in June 1919.

My faith has always been an influence. I believe that the Flanders Memorial Poppy is indeed a spiritual symbol, not just pure sentimentalism. This new optimism for a world returned to peace after the "war to end all wars" is like the magnificent rainbow which appeared in the sky after the terrible flood in the bible.

My “Cause” ran into some road blocks in the next year or so but it did not deter me from my efforts and following every lead and possibility.

I was still working for the Staff of the Overseas YMCA Secretaries in winter of 1918/19. I visited wounded and sick men from my home state of Georgia who were hospitalized in and around New York City. In March, 1919, I moved back to Georgia to teach at the University of Georgia.

While teaching a class of disabled servicemen I realized that not only did we need to honor the memory of those who had died in the war but those who were wounded and had many physical, mental, and spiritual needs. This gave me the spark to widen the scope of the Memorial Poppy idea. I knew it could be developed to help all servicemen with needs for themselves and their dependents.

The American Legion organization was founded in 1919 by veterans of the US Armed Forces to support those who had served in war time in Europe during the First World War. Working through the Georgia American Legion who adopted the Memorial poppy and presented the movement at the National Level, my dreams were realized. One month later, on 29 September, 1920, the National American Legion agreed on the use of the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy as the United States’ national emblem of Remembrance.

Soon after the Armistice, patriotic organizations in different countries began conducting poppy campaigns. The flowers, made by disabled servicemen, raised funds for relief work among handicapped veterans and

their families. Wearing a poppy came to mean honor the dead and help the living.

I hope that the poppy will long be used as a memorial remembrance for Veterans and a symbol of the sacrifices of the decades of war in our history.

NARRATOR: I hope you will remember the stories of these men and women of history when you see the Remembrance Poppy and that the poppy will inspire your prayers of thanks for the service of the Veterans. For those who have been killed in battle and all who have served and are serving. We remember that Freedom is not Free.

RECOGNITION OF VETERANS IN ATTENDANCE AND VETERANS PASSING POPPIES TO CONGREGATION.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-i-p2-1779985>

<https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-i-overview-2361419>

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/article/remembrance-poppy.htm>

<https://poppyladymadameguerlin.wordpress.com/remembrance-poppy-timeline/>